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Dead on Arrival

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Dead on Arrival

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Abstract

Dead on Arrival is a film about a character named Blue. The world is comprised of memories and follows our character along a path of self-discovery and redemption. Blue's earliest memory is that of discovering an object that makes him happy. Through the course of the opening moments of the film, Blue discovers the harsh reality of not quite hitting the mark with his abilities. With the missed mark, comes the self-doubt and negative self-thinking that manifests itself through a physical change in his character. This physical manifestation leads to the rejection of his newfound friend and follows him throughout the rest of the film.

In essence, Blue is defective and must escape the harsh realities of others' judgments. Blue fights to gain the trust and approval of the others around him, only to lead to, what he views, as their destruction. After failing to cut out his defection and faced with the stigmatized view of having a defective body, Blue trudges forward and attempts to gain kinship throughout the following moments. Ultimately, he turns to seek medical assistance to cure himself. After this plan backfires, he accepts his defeat and gives up. Red appears in the story and tries to lift Blue to his feet. Blue, excited to feel the warmth and love that comes with a new relationship, follows Red.

Continuously struggling with himself, Blue accidentally commits the act he was always afraid of and harms Red. After giving what's left of himself to Red. He strikes out at himself. The tears apart his physical body and is faced with his inner demon. Through this process, he learns that the approval one should seek after is their own. Finally, making amends with himself, the remainder of Blue's life is left ambiguous to the audience.

Introduction: Getting Personal

I started along this process intending to make a story that was as far from my personal life as possible. Throughout my companionship with other artists, I was advised to create a film that I could mentally separate from my personal life. This advice came from a place of self-care, as many of them felt making personal films could lead to trouble with work-life balance. However, along the way, the story evolved into one symbolic of my own life. Ultimately, I feel this is what we do as artists. We create art as an avenue of expressing our inner emotive states.

Rationally, I've always drawn inspiration from documentary work. From career-led to personal work, it all ends up in the realm of truth and the portrayal of that. Honesty is a virtue that I strive to have in my life as much as possible. The challenge with this is that I've habitually been extensively private about my life. Along this path, I was discovering that not only was being private unfair to the relationships I held with others, but it was also a form of being dishonest with myself about who I was or who I wanted to be. Ultimately, this led to a film that is more so an adventure into self-discovery and not just a relationship with the world that my character holds.

Dead on Arrival is an abstract narrative. However, the majority of scenes are representations of real events. The events are structured differently, and of course, humans are incapable of falling to physical pieces and being brought back together. Therefore, the film is not a documentary, but my own struggles inspire it.

So, what were those inspirations? Initially, they go back to my failure to fit in fully as a child. This failure is a challenge I suspect everyone deals with at some point in their lives. For myself, it wasn't anything inherently terrible. A few cross-country moves made it to where I

didn't fully have a solid friend base. There were a few bouts of bullying around middle school that led to losing any friends I made after a move. After that, things slowed down, but as a result, either genetic or situational, I had developed major depressive disorder and anxiety. This development was a significant realization that took place roughly a year before the writing of this film took place. I finally had an answer to why I emotionally felt like the equivalent of watching paint dry, or why I tended to be hyper-focused on interpersonal relationships or the motivations behind others' actions.

This realization I had about my mind, is what the film is based around. The film draws its inspiration from my struggle to connect with others, and the blame I placed on my mental health. I felt my mental health was contributing to the destruction of those I held close. Throughout my life, I always viewed myself as a problem and a destructive force that enters people's lives and destroys them. There's no tangible evidence behind this; however, that's how these disorders tend to operate. If enough negativity surrounds you, you'll start to believe you're full of bad luck or that you're a toxic individual.

Another avenue that this film explores is the idea that the rest of society doesn't quite understand the toll this can take. Too many times, I've involved myself in conversations in which the other party expressed that they were afraid of people with mental health problems. They didn't realize that these disorders tend to cause the victim more harm that the surrounding individuals. That's why I made this film. To have an example of the feelings these disorders cause and how the victim sees it. It isn't an in-depth scientific film, but only how it has affected my life and my struggles.

Preproduction and Initial Development

Concept

The creation of this project had its challenging moments. First and foremost, the production schedule and needs had to be clearly defined. These needs, however, could not entirely be determined until I had a rough estimate of the scope. I initially knew the subject matter I wanted to capture, and some stylistic inspirations, however finding a starting point with the methods to go about making it happen was proving difficult. The initial pitch for this project was to create an experimental film that, in essence, made the audience feel empathy towards the events portrayed throughout. After working with advisors, this idea was able to evolve a bit further, and I decided to push the film more-so towards an abstract narrative. This decision was important, as it forced me to draw more inspiration from what I knew and understood, instead of just how I felt disorders had affected me in my own life. Not only this, but it also pushed me to give the film a purpose for the audience watching that might not quite understand what it may be like living this type of life.

The major challenge with this, as with many stories, is deciding a timeline over which to tell a story. I felt a singular life experience couldn't begin to capture a disorder that affects every facet of your life from childhood into adulthood. The great news about knowing that, is that I had finally found a starting point. I wanted to take the audience on a journey from the initial realization that something didn't feel "right" in a sense for the character and lead them towards the present day on where they stand.

Quite frankly, I decided to take details of my own life and the significant events that seared themselves into my memory. I wanted to capture the significant portions that shaped me into adulthood and use them as fuel to create a story.

The entirety of the project isn't my life, verbatim, by any means. However, it does follow key emotions I felt during my struggles with depression and portrays them more visually so that the audience could see, rather than be educated.

Another central point to bring to attention is the timeline. I knew the film had to adhere to a few key constraints. The story had to be achievable, it had to stay within the realm of a short film, and I wanted to do so without using dialogue.

With these constraints in mind, the more complicated development process started to reveal itself, strictly when developing a successful story. It goes without mentioning that this doesn't include the technical side of the film that is a separate battle within filmmaking. Overall, the process needs to be trusted; however, making something that is so inherently personal is what ultimately led to the complication. How do I take pieces of myself and display them for an audience? How do I make that entertaining? Will they enjoy it?

Asking myself these questions was stressful, but quickly turned therapeutic and almost methodic for my mental health. I never set off to make an *entertaining* film; I set off to make a film. It was never intended for the film to be action-filled and suspenseful; The intent was to invoke feelings of empathy towards my character. It was at this point that I was fully able to take a step back and realize the scope of this project.

Society, in my experience, tends to try to find how something relates to themselves or their experiences whenever new information presents itself to them. I think that most tend to look at something new and say, "why do I care?" and when they do so, they tend to find common ground and move forward on whether they like something or are repulsed by it. I wanted to expand upon this instinct. It was then that my film began to develop. I went through each painful memory of

mine, or each detail of why I ended up in my mental state, placed my character at the peak of them and forced them to go through them in succession. The audience, at this point, would only get motion and symbolism out of the scene, not dialogue nor words written. If done successfully, they would be able to grasp the initial concept that the character is struggling, and then find the connection to their own life. They would eventually begin to *feel* something towards my character, and whether it was empathy or rejection, they would be on one end of the interactions. Although that was my goal, it isn't enough to make a successful narrative, which led to the decision to add in the growing stain enveloping my character. This stain was the identifier of Blue's struggles and inner mental state, displayed for the world to see on their body. The main drive for this was the fact that the people around us don't know what's inside but only what we display. The existence or lack of honest self-expression is what tells others how to accept us into their lives or how we wish to be perceived.

Look development

In the initial planning phase of this project, I knew I wanted to focus more on abstract design and an ethereal feel as well as capturing realism as much as possible. Both of these styles are relatively contradictory, so I needed a middle ground. In the beginning, I knew some of the techniques I wanted to emulate, and the concept I wanted to tell. However, I needed to solve the challenge of combining these into a narrative film while retaining the goals of the story. Other critical factors for this, included character animation and stylistic choices. With the film also being a conglomeration of life events and not a straight point A to B story, reoccurring elements were going to be key as well. I knew the colors were important for this as well as environmental design as the character was going to be continually evolving and encountering numerous others and would be developing throughout the film.

Character Design: A Personality as a Skin

Initially, deciding which parts of the film were to have a realistic style was difficult at best. I started this process by breaking the film down into crucial components based on the initial goal of having the audience be able to relate to the character. The character was at the center, and the rest of the film had to revolve around this. This detail led me to a realization of myself as an artist, and a large part of where I struggle with animation is the exaggerated motions. I tend to look at the natural world more for inspiration. Our brains can recognize a human figure quickly, but also non-human movement. We are more susceptible to ignoring motion if it is familiar.

The first key in this process as I knew my characters had to move realistically, and with the lack of dialogue, be able to portray emotions. The subtleties in our body language are what sells this, so I knew I needed full body animation that was as close to human emotion as possible to make it the most relatable. After some discussion with my mentors, they steered me to try motion capture. After some initial thought put into the subject, I was able to conclude that I could use motion capture to create those realistic movements and emotions. However, this was a different challenge as the performances by the actors needed to be a bit more exaggerated so that they would translate onto the screen and be able to be perceived well by an audience.

The use of motion capture stood out to me as being used well in advertising. Method Studios created a fantastic reel that combined various techniques their team had developed over the years. The *2016 AICP Sponsor Reel* (2016), Created by Method Design, combined motion capture with upbeat music for a fantastic visual experience. Their use of a humanoid figure with various body transformations largely influenced my initial planning phase. I saw how abstract their work was, and it helped quell the fear I had about having such an *anonymous* humanoid character.

As for the character design itself, I now felt comfortable that I could be a bit more abstract with this. I needed to find a bridge between a figure that was recognizable as human, but not specific enough that the audience couldn't see themselves in the same environment as the character. Method studios did such a fantastic job of capturing human movement in a *non-human* body. Initially, I wanted to have characters made out of simple geometric shapes that could morph into other objects. Morphing objects are an additional technical challenge, but also, would do next to nothing to serve my intent with the film. If the characters were to have any "special ability" when it came to changing shape, It needed to make sense to the audience and serve a purpose in the film. As much as I wanted to, I couldn't simply add in extra elements because I thought they looked *cool;* Everything needed a purpose. After a lot of thought on my subject matter, a reoccurring idea that kept coming back to me was the feelings of brokenness and feeling shattered. That truly was how I felt at times, and it translated well to my character. I deliberated on this idea for quite some time. My film had to serve more than myself, and so did my character. The fact of the matter is, we're all reasonably incomplete, and consistently a work in progress. This idea stuck with me throughout the entire film. I needed each of my characters to be representative of this.

As for the anonymity of a design, I thought a lot about the general makeup of a human figure. I thought, "Why was I so drawn to the *2016 AICP Sponsor Reel"*. There's a set standard in which the average person has when it comes to limbs, and what makes that figure recognizable. Bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Method Studios had characters without faces or skin and still captured the human energy. I wanted to capture the same essence of that anonymous look. In animation, you want to push character designs into a specific category that portrays their personalities and the story simultaneously; I wanted to do the opposite. I wanted the audience to be able to put themselves in the character's emotional state while ignoring the overall makeup of

the proportions of the characters. I thought about this further, and where else in our lives we may have seen something like this? Where do we try to visualize ourselves consistently in what we don't currently have?

Fig 1. An example of the character models in *2016 AICP Sponsor Reel*

After pushing this idea further, I realized that this is something every shopper does. Looking into the windows of any clothing store, it's standing there gazing back at you with a seemingly indifferent expression. This function of design is prevalent in Mannequins for this purpose. Display something on the outside, in this case, clothing, and let the person who gazes upon them, visualize how those items might look on them. That was why I was so drawn to Method Studios' work. They took an old marketing idea and made it come to life with energy. I was able to take inspiration from where this has prevailed for years in the world of marketing and push it to meet my film's needs. If I took on the appearance of these lifeless beings, my character could easily put their emotional states on display, draw attention to them, and the rest of the design would fade into the background, albeit for the symbolism of a broken individual.
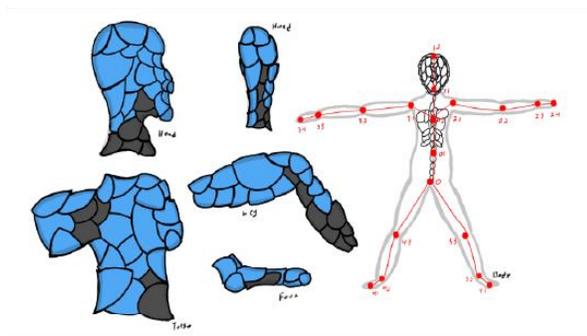
Fig 2. An early character sketch with joint layouts

The remaining pieces of the final character design was a combination of patterns I found in nature. To capture the shattered look, I drew inspiration from the patterns found in cracked mud and broken rocks. Specifically, when a rock is in a stream, the edges round off and fit together in a smooth look that gave exactly the feel I desired for this. I was able to be abstract with the "shell" of my character while retaining the overall human figure and invoking feelings into the viewer without being too distracting or having them place my character into a social class or archetype.

The character just needed one final piece, and that was the visualization of their mental health. I thought about self-expression and symbolism. I thought about how people will get tattoos as a way of treating their bodies like a canvas. I thought about people who wear their hearts on their sleeves. I thought about how someone could view an expired limb or their emotions in much of the same manner. This what was I needed to push my character further. Ultimately, I decided to give them a tattoo of sorts. I didn't specifically want this just to be a film about mental disease, though, but more so of the idea of self-esteem. The character would have a physical appearance that they viewed as an ailment, would reject it themselves, be rejected by others, and attempt to get rid of it. By coloring the arm of the character with a marking, it would be more apparent that this was something the character wanted to themselves rid of. For the audience, this could mean

to them, too much body fat, a crooked smile, a dimple, a lack of muscular build, or the feeling of being broken. This item could be anything that they may view physically or mentally as a defective part of themselves they wish to rid themselves of or destroy.
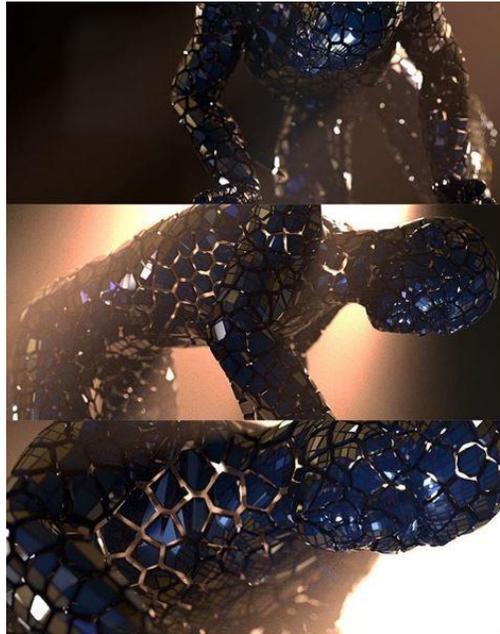
Fig 3, 4, 5. A test render of the final character look

Environment: The World is a Big Place

Environment design was an essential factor in this situation as I needed the audience to identify them quickly, while also fitting within my stylistic goals. A short film that has resonated with me inspired this. *Paper World* (2014) by László Ruska and David Ringeisen created a short film that captured the essence of animals living within a world constructed of office supplies. This film showed me that it isn't the object that gives a sense of place. It's the shape and space that can portray a world. It showed me that you could trigger a sense of place with the simple structure of a mountain, even if the texture and materials don't match. I desired to capture this sense of location in my film.

However, I also knew I didn't want my work to be full-scale locations. With this in mind, I decided to have each of my environments become larger than life. However, I wanted the audience to be able to quickly have a sense of place as not to contradict my goal of having raw emotion in each scene. I wanted objects that were realistic and identifiable so that each scene could be recognizable and relatable. By having set items in critical locations for the story, the audience could quickly visualize them and then place their energy on paying focus to the characters. The environments also weren't as crucial for interaction as they were for setting the tone and locations, so I could be a bit more abstract with the environments themselves, as long as I stuck to simple and realistic objects. Ultimately my work is drastically different from *Paper World.* However, I do believe I achieved the goal of capturing the same quick sense of place László Ruska and David Ringeisen were able to capture.

Fig 6. An example of the environments in *Paper World*

The environments as a whole should be as non-invasive as possible. The largest of these was the opening scene in the bedroom. I wanted this to be clear for the story that it was a child's bedroom. I tried to find an object that everyone will recognize as a child's toy, while also keeping in mind that not everyone can relate to specific things as they may not have owned them as children. I felt a common ground for this was a doctor's office, as most children can remember going to the doctor, whether they were afraid of them or not. In the waiting room of almost every

doctor's office, I went to as a child, was a bead maze. I felt this was a giant symbol of childhood and began my film with it as a symbol for youth. The intent for the final film was to take this idea of recognizable everyday objects and use them as a backdrop in the remaining scenes of the film. Each location would contain this as a method to set the place and life-stage. Settings intended to be backdrops of the character's emotional state or the inside of their mind were discluded from this.

The scenes in my film that are symbolic of the character's thoughts were where most of the abstraction could take place. There isn't a set way to represent a character's thoughts without the use of a voice-over, and once you add in the audience aspect of that, you really can't hone in on one all-encompassing style. I decided to take the stance of merely having a void for this. I wanted no objects to be associated with the mind of the character, except themselves and their perceptions. The environment is entirely barren, except for volumetric lighting and the character.

Lighting and Rendering: Contrast and Beauty

The rendering and lighting of the scenes were decided upon early in the beginning stages as well. To stay consistent with realism, I knew I had to stick to realistic shaders that didn't stand out as to distract from the character. There were a few instances where this could be ignored. However, for the most part, I needed the lighting to be quickly identifiable, realistic, and also able to invoke the more emotive aspects of the film. Critical components used were volumetric window lighting to give warmth or a comfortable feeling, and harsh dark lighting to add to the inner emotional state of the character. I enjoy darker images and the lighting within them. A major issue I've had with other animations is that its almost as if the designers are afraid not to use soft lighting as animations are typically happier and more upbeat films. This theme went against the subject matter and emotions I wanted to invoke. *The Alchemist's letter* (2015) by Carlos Stevens is an

inspiration for this, as it goes outside the traditional animation style. The short starts visually bright, but over time, the film gets progressively darker. Scenes in the film aren't afraid to have visible shadows or show contrast between the character and the environment. The film captures the darker side of reality, and elegantly uses light to enhance the story being told. There is also a multitude of visual effects that help light the world around the character and give a sense of place. When the tone changes in the narration, the image reflects that change with colder, more muted lighting. This is close to my preferred style. I wanted to capture the tonal range that could be seen in *The Alchemist's letter.* My film also demanded emotional shifts throughout. *Therefore* I tried to use as much low-key lighting as possible. With the addition of volumetric lighting, I could also stick to my ethereal aesthetic and goals.

Fig 7, 8. Two contrasting lighting environments from *The Alchemist's Letter*

Each scene would have basic lighting setups to start with and was then further customized to fit the tonal range for individual settings. The lighting setups went well beyond three-point lighting, as I wanted the environments to be more natural. Each scene would be ambiently lit, with practical lights acting as a fill for the shadows and the key-light for the characters. Volumetric lighting would be efficient in adding ambiance to the scene and adding depth to the images. Lastly, I knew lighting could be essential to setting the tone and a sense of place for my characters.

Throughout the film, the lighting gets increasingly dimmer. This change is suggestive of the character's inner emotional state and helps show the contrast of the character's internal state

when compared to the opening scene. This tonal shift would primarily be evident when the character seeks help, as I wanted this scene to drive the emotions of helplessness for the protagonist through cold and harsh lighting. This tone fit my intent, as that scene's location would be a doctor's office. Normally you would find bright, soft lighting in these environments, so in advance, I prepared to have this scene more stylized. The rest of the film followed suit. I wanted to take the base lighting and push it a small bit further. It had to be close enough that the audience could recognize the environment but still retain the tonal shifts. At this point is when the decision came to set a lot of scenes at night. By having the scenes set at night, I could retain the harsh shadows found in low-key lighting and stick to my goal of using practical lights.

The last piece of the puzzle here was to ensure I had depth between the character and the environments to ensure they wouldn't become overwhelming. A common way I've overcome this in the past was to use a kicker to edge-light characters. There was going to be a lot of movement in the scenes; therefore, a static light would be more of a challenge to retain consistency. I floated this idea around a bit and decided to move forward with it, however, if the need was presented, using a moving kicker that could dolly with character motion should they leave the range of the light.

Story Development: Who am I?

Now that I had a conceptual starting point and the desired look, I needed to go back through my experiences and share them with my film and push the development of the story further. A significant roadblock I found was that many things I can't remember anymore. Numbers and information come easily, but positive emotions were more at the bottom end. This misfortune meant I had to select the most crucial parts of what was left.

Scene 1 – A Child's Room

The opening of the film was essential to establish the initial energy of the character. The goal behind the character's action and movement was symbolic of youthful energy and the playful, curious nature that comes along with it. The arrival of the other character is also a driving factor in this scene. This motivation is strictly from the perspective of the character, to have fun and let loose. Soon after, a new marking appears on Blue, and the dynamic of the scene shifts into more negative energy. The alternate character in the scene begins dissolving and becomes a worsening factor for the negative energy. The energy shift drives Blue to perceive moments not as a slight detrimental occurrence, but as total rejection.

The inspiration I melded into his scene was my continuous struggle to feel like I was a part of a team. I look back upon my childhood and remember how excited I used to get about most things. A setback for this is I tended to develop the fear of being happy because of the overwhelming anxiety that would come with it. This mental shift made it hard to fit in in social settings, and I wanted to inject that into my character.

The purpose of this was to show that the character was once free to show who they were, until that initial rejection.

Scene 2 – The Bathroom

The character faces this scene with the dilemma of trying to fix themselves and risking major self-harm in the process. Blue comes face to face with a razor blade as they stand and contemplate trying to free themselves from this defective part of their body. Ultimately, they decide to run their arm against the razor and collapse to the ground.

This scene was a representation of how I struggled with self-harm as a teenager and thought it was an avenue to try and "fix" myself. These events were a stain on my life, and I needed to get rid of it at all costs.

Scene 3 – The Kitchen

In the third scene, the character approaches another figure for help. Blue hugs the character tightly until, once again, their defect is visible. The other figure rejects this and shoves our protagonist away from them. Abandoning them and exiting the scene. In a swell of emotion, our protagonist punches a knife rack.

The motivation behind this scene was taking a crucial part of my adolescence that I feel taught me a lot about how to hide my emotions. This realization ties in directly to the previous event, as it is representative of when I initially tried to get help for self-harming. Deep down, I knew this was an unhealthy coping mechanism and left them in a visible location as I was too unsure of how to get help for this. In the process, I was rejected by family members for what I had done.

Acting as an inciting event in my own life and the life of my character, this was key to show a shift in motivations. The character internalized this struggle and foremost wanted to try to help others who have visible "scars."

Scene 4 – The Park

The character sits in a park and notices that the person they are with also has markings along their body. Excitedly, they point out the markings, only for the other character to recoil in fear. This sudden reaction leads to them standing up to run away from the protagonist, and they accidentally trip and shatter all over the ground.

This scene is more so a bridge of what came next in life. It's a culmination of the different personality types I had come across, and what I noticed. Initially, I always thought people just wanted to be understood, and by understanding them, you can build a connection and bond with them. Entering adulthood, after different relationships and social learning, this proved to be the opposite. I learned that a lot of people were afraid of being faced with who they were, regardless of how visible their "inner personalities" were. Most people only wished to be seen as who they thought they were, not what they are. So even if someone had the remnants of a similar struggle, the last thing they wanted was to confront that and bond over it.

Scene 5 – The Void

The audience for the first time is in the headspace of our protagonists. They witness him run through the inner environment of his mind as he faces his perception of his life and relationships thus far. He comes across three separate versions of himself. Each account appears happy from the outside and then shattered from existence. Each time, he is gripped by the reality of the situation and runs away, only to be faced with the next happening.

This scene isn't centrally about the influence of events on the mindset of the characters. More so, it's about how during each of these events, the pain is internalized by the disorders. This internalization is more so a dialogue on how, throughout my own life, I have viewed social relationships as a form of validation, only for them to disappear from my life. For a long time, I struggled with this idea and internalized this to the point of self-doubt and self-blame. I told myself, "something must be wrong with me." After a repetition of this, it's hard not to take it as a statement on your personality. However, I also wanted to show the lack of information gathered during this.

For the audience, all they will see is a brief happy moment for our character before it's stripped away. I feel this is the best way to represent what it is like living with a negative outlook on life. The individuals faced with this will ignore the details of the situation and hyper fixate on the outcome. I look back on my own life and realize that a lot of failed relationships and friendships weren't because of the lack of being good enough, but that sometimes, things just don't work.

Scene 6 – The Ambulance

Blue has lost the best things in his life. After internalizing this, he views himself only as a vessel for others' pain. He crouches on the back of an ambulance, taking he negativity others hold within themselves, internalizing it, and giving a piece of himself back to make them whole again. He does this repetitively to the point of exhaustion.

My late teens and early twenties largely inspired this. I no longer sought to have long term relationships with others. I entered their lives, attempted to make them better for what it was worth, and then would exit. In a way, this was my method of getting validation from others. It was no longer about getting close with others, but just attempting to give them as much of myself as possible. Of course, this only could last for so long before it would overwhelm me and become too much to handle.

The choice to stage this scene on the back of an ambulance derived from my observations of first responders and medical personnel. Over my time, I have spoken to and gotten to know many on a personal level, and they, in my mind, are some of the most selfless individuals I've ever met. They would take a part of themselves, their energy, and their hope, and give it to others so that they could live a better life. I looked at my own life, realizing how selfish it is to help

others as a sense of self-gratification or to feel as if I'm worth something. It was best to draw more inspiration from those who did this selflessly and pay respect to that. Unfortunately, they don't do so without the repercussions of having to internalize that pain and suffering.

Scene 7 – The Floor

Blue sits next to an alcohol bottle, looking at how far the stain has spread. Unable to understand his own emotion, he fills with rage and frustration. He slams his fists and stands there hopeless. Defeated, he hits the ground.

The main goal of this is less so inspiration taken from my own life and more of a dialogue on how frustration can manifest and lead to what's next. Sometimes this can lead to substance abuse to cope or violent outbursts due to being unable to process an emotional state. Whichever realm an individual is in, usually, it takes an extreme event for them to realize that they can't handle this turmoil on their own.

Scene 8 – The Hospital

After slamming the ground, Blue falls onto the counter of a hospital room. They crawl towards a medicine bottle. The stains recede and begin to heal. A sharp pain suddenly hits Blue, causing him to run out of the bottle and throw it off the counter. Defeated, he curls up into the fetal position, only to be disturbed by another character, Red. They quickly bond and run off together.

The statement of help was vital to the story and held a high value for me. Many individuals attempt to find remedies for how they are feeling. I also fell into this category. Unfortunately for many, myself, and Blue, these remedies were ineffective and only heightened sensitivities to the issues. A time in my life where I sought treatment for my mental health

largely inspired this portion of the story. Initially, treatments were effective, and it was great. Unfortunately, over time, adverse effects led to me rejecting treatment and realizing I needed to find other methods behind it. I started to lean on friendships and relationships more often as a support system, and that inspired the arrival of the red character at the end of the scene. I had reached a turning point in my life, and I wanted to portray this for Blue. This moment was the beginning of his turning point as well.

Scenes 9-11 – The Montage

The following scenes are to be a montage of Blue and Red, being suggestive of all the time they were now spending together. The imagery of a car dashboard, and a dinner table, ending in a bedroom are a representation of their dating life. However, Blue increasingly slows down and becomes restless. After the initial burst of energy, his stains are still growing. Red offers a piece of herself.

Blue was using a relationship to seek validation. The mistakes I made in my early twenties, inspired that behavior trait. When it came to an unhealthy worldview, other people, and especially relationships, can't save you from that. I thought I needed those connections in life to become the person I wanted to be. I sought them out specifically to feel happy. In the beginning, it feels great; however, over time, you realize that you're just masking the symptoms of larger issues at hand. The other caution to be aware of is that other people will try to give you everything of themselves, placing themselves in what was once the same position as yourself. This position of giving everything they have to help assist you is a lot to ask of another person. Your life is your responsibility, and its important to grow *with* someone, not use them as a cure.

Scene 12 – The Sink

Blue left the room and is standing over a sink. He tries to rip the stains from his body to no avail. Red approaches him to try anything that would help. Blue, in his fixation, knocks her over the edge, injuring her. Barely a shell of who he used to be, he gives the remainder of himself to Red to try and fix her wounds.

Blue fixing Red is a more visual explanation of the previous scene. In the tunnel vision attitude to fix oneself, you can get lost in the process and hurt others. In their efforts to help, they get injured in the process. Blue's final realization is that he has hurt someone he loves because of his growing scars.

Scene 13 – The Internal Struggle

The final scene takes place within Blue's mind. Once again, he has lost something he cared about because of his stain. Placing his problems in full blame, he begins to tear the stains from his body. He comes face to face with this other personality of his and becomes ashamed. The counterpart, however, lifts his chin and hugs him. Blue hugs back, and they both dissolve into nothing.

The purpose of this ending was to show that Blue was missing self-acceptance throughout the story. Without being able to accept himself, his relationships constantly struggled, and his problems always got worse—a direct realization taken from my own life. I spent so many years wanting to improve and hating myself for what I was, instead of embracing it and moving forward. The negativity towards myself was always what enhanced my depression and anxiety.

Ending Theme

I set out to tell a story about how depression affects someone. However, I wanted it to be universal enough that others could relate. Initially, Red and Blue were the solutions for each

other, helping one another get better before they became identical. Ending the film like this, would have been detrimental and taken away the message I set out to tell. After having quite a few colleagues and friends read the initial script, the key component they wanted to change, was the message.

Thematically there had to be some closure. I couldn't tell a story that had a character get progressively worse and then fail as that didn't do anything for the audience. There was no message in that. I especially needed to change the original ending with Blue and Red, as the previous scenes stated that relying on others wasn't the solution to your problems. Those key reasons are how I ended up with the current ending.

Overall, the film needed the audience to leave with a centralized thematic. By choosing an ending about self-realization, I was able to give the rest of the film meaning. Showing vignettes of a character only went so far; however, when they lead up to a message, the audience can leave with that. I intentionally wanted the film to be easy to insert any personal story into, and by having self-acceptance as the message, I felt I could capture a universal element into my film that portrays the struggles shared by a wide breadth of individuals.

Making the Film

After having a solid story and vision, I had to accomplish making the film. There were a lot of technical challenges ahead, as my vision relied heavily on more advanced methods. This process had to start with analyzing each scene and making notes of critical challenges I'll need to overcome along the way. The challenges came in two separate avenues, the technical and the managerial. Notably, I had a motion capture workflow ahead of me, a dynamic character model, and various effects that represent vital story elements. On the flip side, I had a too personal story

and an evolving timeline. These challenges led to many nights, where I felt like my back was against the wall as a small hiccup could lead to a significant production set back on an otherwise strict timeline.

Motion Capture

Utilizing motion capture was the basis of my film, and my vision was moderately dependent on this. To prepare for this, after the initial animatic, I drew out overhead scene plans for blocking and environment layout purposes. The reasoning behind this was that motion capture involved utilizing real actors in physical spaces. Normally in 3D, you can place objects wherever you want. However, I would derive my initial character movement from the real world. I opted to treat the production as I would a live-action film. By using the overhead plans, I could block out character movement across scenes, edit each scene using match cuts, and have a solid idea of how I should direct the actors.

After the initial blocking phase, I was able to isolate whether I needed simultaneous actors in each scene. Certain shots without direct character interaction could be accomplished with a single actor, whereas others'demanded I use multiple actors. Another critical factor was the character blocking. In some scenes, the characters only moved in an area equivalent to a few feet, whereas in others', a character would run across an entire frame or around an environment. I needed specialized systems that could capture both, or I would have to cheat the blocking. In the end, It was imperative I use both methods. A third method was the decision to treat my scenes like multi-camera live-action shoots. The film had some length and just over 100 different camera shots. Doing motion capture work for every individual shot could lead to mistakes in the final edit as well as extending the production timeline. I was able to consolidate a lot of this action with the multi-camera setup, which led to deciding on a capture system.

There were two different motion capture systems used in the production of the film. The first was a sensor-based wireless capture system that could send the data over a Wi-Fi connection. The second was a standard optics-based system that utilized 15 separate capture cameras to capture the data through infra-red markers. The decision to use two different systems meant there would be a challenge in making them fit seamlessly together, and I had to develop two separate workflows for the data.

I ultimately decided that the sensor-based system was going to be the basis for any scene in which Blue was alone. The sensor-based system would be responsible for capturing any running during a scene. A driving factor behind this was the range of the sensor-based suit in comparison to the optics-based system. The sensor-based had a range up to 100 yards versus the 15-feet typically found within an optics-based capture method. Any remaining scenes involving multiple characters and limited movement that could not be captured well with the sensor-based system would rely on the optics-based capture.

The primary reason behind two separate systems came down to access to gear. I had limited access to the optics-based system, and the timeline for shooting dates was unable to be determined early in the production. On the flip side, the sensor-based system only had a single suit. Therefore, any scenes with multiple characters would need to be filmed repetitively, and I couldn't ensure the blocking and positioning would be exact enough to fit together seamlessly.

Motion Capture Workflow

After deciding on the need to use separate systems, the priority was to shoot the motion capture footage as soon as possible and model my environments around the performances. In the meantime, between scheduling shooting dates, assets for the film could be in production.

However, building the foreground of the environments would need to be based around the final character motion. This circumstance meant an initial workflow would have to be in place before production could begin. The workflow also needed to be capable of tieing in data from two different systems into a singular model and rig.

I ultimately had to create two separate rigs for the base model. One rig would utilize the data points provided by the sensor-based system and the other by the optics-based. By using a generic human model, I could create separate skeletons that were unique to the capture requirements. Each model was then copied over to an alternate scene and had the capture data applied. I ran the capture data through a simple script I created that would normalize the naming conventions to match those of my model. The goal of the script was to prevent having to create a separate rig for individual scenes. Any cleanup work would be done within the unique file and then referenced to a master that would host the environments. By linking to a master, it allowed for cleanup work to be an evolving process. Another benefit of this process was that it would allow me to reshoot any scenes and replace the data easily if the performances weren't exactly what I wanted. I took inspiration for this workflow from my time as an editor and utilizing a proxy workflow. In theory, you could start with a "low-res" performance and update it later in the process without having to rebuild the environments. This process proved useful, as I could create scratch performances and work those into the film until I had official shoot dates set up with my actors.

The detrimental side of this was that the final character designs would have to wait, as their creation relied on separate software. Afterward, the data would need a roundtrip back into Maya.

Character Generation

After the initial model was animated and placed within a scene, I could send it off to generate the final character look. As the characters were meant to be physically dynamic and had changing textures, I opted to use Houdini to generate the different parts and send those back into Maya. The base animated file was converted into an Alembic sequence and imported into Houdini. A series of points were generated and scattered over the character geometry. The point positions allowed for an alembic file of the final animation to deform and alter their world position. The primary objective behind this would be to stick the points in place and reduce the chance that they would shift over time. The points also controlled final generation of a Voronoi pattern. This pattern was the underlying fracture over the base model and achieved the shattered look. The faces of the Voronoi Fracture were isolated and split off into a subgroup, extruded, and then the edges were beveled to create the look of smooth stones. The unique part of this workflow allowed for the character model to be made entirely of rigid body particles that could interact with the world's physics.

The creation of the stains on the character was a similar workflow. A primary challenge for this was the core of how Voronoi fracturing works in Houdini. The pattern is generated utilizing positioning within the world. Therefore, when the character moved, the face IDs would change. This alteration in the face ID's meant that any textures and shaders applied, would scatter around the model every frame. To overcome this, I would export the "stained" face of the model out as an extracted model and import two alembic files into Houdini. After running them through the initial generation, I would then export then be able to export them as separate pieces that would function separately from one another but retain the original design.

After generation on the character model was completed and finalized, I was able to export from Houdini as another alembic sequence and import the final character model into the

scenes to be shaded. The stains would have a separate shader applied to them, and they would be grouped back together, creating the final character look.

Effects Generation

Utilizing the same workflow for my character generation, I could also have a secure way of generating character effects. I extracted the character's hands as a separate model and used the original point scatter on that base geometry within Houdini. Each point would then create an emitter for particle effects. The effects would be done within the same scene as the character generation so that the smoke would flow through the cracks of the character model in a more natural manner. The smoke data was then exported as a VDB sequence, imported into Maya, and rendered alongside the rest of the scene.

This workflow would also prove to be effective for any character dynamics that would happen. In the opening scene, the character builds itself from a shattered ball. I simulated the Voronoi as a Rigid Body System in Houdini and then exported that as an Alembic sequence into Maya. I could then play this file in reverse, and have it cut to the non-rigid body model at the end of its simulation to create a seamless transition between them. By utilizing this workflow, I could then run a more straight forward simulation and achieve the look I envisioned while having a malleable character.

Rendering

Arnold renderer was chosen for the film as it is easily accessible, most familiar, and could render each of the different needs found in my film. Arnold Shaders could easily be affected by volumetric lighting and HDRI maps to make realism more achievable. By combining

this alongside render layers, I was able to achieve quick renders that retained the quality I wanted with the lighting.

Render layers were used extensively throughout the film. Each scene had its own needs depending on the action; However, they all followed the same structure. I broke the scenes into four main elements to begin rendering. The first was a background layer. By separating the background layer, I could generate a single frame for static camera shots, thus saving machine power in the process and overall having a less expensive workflow. The second was the character layer. The characters were placed into individual render layers and rendered separately from the rest of the elements. A separate character layer allowed for the replacement of each character without a full scene render. This technique would prove useful towards the end of the film in the event the animation needed to be touched up. The third render layer was a shadow map layer. By separating the shadow maps, I could composite the characters back into the scene to achieve a result close to the original Beauty map while saving the render time of having to render the underlying geometry. The fourth layer was in most scenes and was the Volumetric lighting. The fourth layer was the final element added during compositing and helped me to retain the original look and style of lighting found in the film.

Compositing

Utilizing The Foundry's Nuke, I was able to work with render layers efficiently and add additional aspects during post-production not rendered in the initial shot. Compositing with this technique allowed for more control over the final image and more stylistic choices. For efficiency reasons, I opted to do most of the camera processing within the compositing stage. In the original render files, I rendered each shader attribute as a separate data point. In Nuke, the image was split into the individual components and merged back together. By separating the

data, I could adjust specific colors and exposure levels for each of the image elements. After the images join back together, I could then take the Z pass data and add depth of field to the image. By post-processing the images, I was allowed a more stylistic final image and better cinematography.

Challenges

Throughout the production of this film, I struggled with what felt like one set back after another. I could work around each setback; however, there were a few that ultimately proved detrimental to the final product. The primary setback was the scheduling of a motion capture studio time. Early in my production, the initial plan was to start shooting my capture by the start of the third month. Due to technical challenges, this delayed production by four months. Out of what was initially supposed to be an eight-month production, being four months behind schedule can break the project. Luckily, I was able to use this time and plan out efficient workflows and test them for issues. The major downfall to this is I had to compile and clean up the entire film over two weeks. This strict timeline can be achieved, however with the amount of simulation time, render time, and overall final touches needed on the film, it was quite the journey.

To overcome this challenge, I tried to build as many assets as I could and preliminarily block out where I thought the motion would be. I recorded scratch captures to test to see if the film would work, and preemptively lit as much of the film as I could. Having a workflow that allowed for proxy animation allowed the project to stay on track for the most part.

Towards the end of production, however, network issues arose due to the sheer number of colleagues copying files from our render farm. This challenge led to the delay in being able to finish the film on schedule. This decision was a tough one to make, as I had lived and breathed

this film for so many months. In the end, it had to be done and was just one more thing we have to overcome as artists in doing a project.

Reception

Due to the technical challenges I faced and the mistakes I made during production, I didn't get to screen this film alongside my peers. When it was finally time for my film to screen, it had to be done in an unprecedented way. At the time of the screening, the world was fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. New York was under lockdown orders, and large gatherings were under temporary suspension. The best solution was to host an online screening that could be safely watched from home. Audience feedback and comments were given to the artist through a live commenting system. Although this was not the screening I envisioned, it was still great to finally see this work through. I hadn't made any style of work like this before, and I was fairly nervous about the audience's reaction to the film. Would my intent be able to come across? Was I going to invoke emotion in the audience in the way I intended?

Unfortunately, it's hard to read the room through a digital screen. The feedback I received didn't quite have the response I expected. In the allotted time, comments came in much quicker than I could read them, and the majority were centered around the look of the film. I had a good chuckle because of the amount of clapping icons being sent in the chat. This was a new experience for all of us, and it calmed my nerves to see that. A few had touched upon getting lost along the journey of my character. In hindsight, I would have to agree. As an artist, making work so personal, it is tremendously challenging to take a big enough step back to see if the audience will understand the intent. Ultimately, and a few comments expressed this, was the performances needed a bigger push. They did not quite hit the mark I intended, and I can safely assume that it will lead to audiences having a tougher grasp on the story. I received a few

comments on having a successful story, but I guess that's art, right? It's subjective, and some audiences will love one story while others may not.

Throughout the production of this project, I poured so much time and energy into building the environment where my characters would reside. To hear the audience feedback on how well done the artistic avenues of the film were, helped me finally feel proud of the work I've made. It's been a struggle in general for me to feel proud of my work, and I tend to be hypercritical on everything I do. The majority of feedback was centered on how well done the process overall was. I feel the audience was very receptive to the overall cinematography of the film, and the atmosphere created. The lighting stood out for the audience, and I am happy to have achieved that goal.

Throughout my entire career in film, I have been drawn to visuals. To realize that the visual side of my film was such a success during this screening, helps me realize where my strengths and weaknesses reside. It is comforting to know that I can create work well received by an audience. Equally, I also know now, moving forward, where I need to work harder and smarter, and that's the most comforting aspect of it.

I hope to have additional screenings for wider audiences for this film. I would have loved to have a more open dialogue with the audience in person. I look forward to an opportunity when the world can do that again, and we can all be in person, sharing what we love about our art.

Artists Statement and Final Thoughts

Artists Statement

I entered study at RIT in 2012. When I arrived, I envisioned making films drastically different from the one that screened. Before formal education, it was common for me to have a

multitude of ideas while simultaneously having no clue how to begin. These ideas came without inspiration other than to create something that I deemed was interesting. Throughout my journey here, I was critiqued heavily, preconceived notions I had about art were tossed out the window, and what I set out to create was reshaped and molded by my mentors and colleagues. Nearly eight years later, I am submitting my final idea as a student of this university. My mindset towards art has changed tremendously, and my relationship with myself has equally changed. In March of 2016, I applied to continue my education here as a graduate student. I wrote the following in a personal statement:

"Throughout my time as an undergraduate, I found my passion for

creating the worlds that people could be lost in."

At the time, this is who I felt I was as an artist. I felt that art was meant to be a form of escape and that I created art to entertain an audience. In making this film, I had discovered the severity of how much I had changed over the years as an artist. Initially, I wanted to create imaginary worlds that an audience could be lost in. I wanted to give people a fictional environment to lose themselves in for a few hours before returning to the harsh nature of reality. I envisioned my role to be one of creativity and excitement. However, that is not who I am outside of art.

What I did learn during my time here was the opposite of who I was as an artist. It was overbearing and frightening at times that despite my efforts around every corner was something that shattered my preconceived ideas about why I wanted this career path. However, I think this is the most important thing any student can learn. It is so much harder for someone to face the music about their reality and face the truth behind who they are not than it is to just accept yourself for who you think you are.

A key component of my film is the existence of mental disorders. They warp our mindset against our will and invade every facet of the sufferer's minds. It is a constant ebb and flow of suffocation by our thoughts. A detrimental side effect of this is not knowing where to place blame. This idea is the core of my film. I wanted to capture that constant day to day rejection we give ourselves. The view that who we are is somehow a defect in our personalities. I wanted to capture the blame and the self-doubt that can manifest in our thought processes and ultimately lead to self-hatred. This false reality warps our mindset, and most of the time, it is against our will. This, I feel, is an issue everyone struggles with from time to time. We should not blame ourselves for not being *normal*. Normal is a setting on a washing machine, not a human trait.

The conclusion of my film was inspired by something I have learned in the past few years. You do not love *because,* you love *despite*. Self-care and self-love should not stem from the person you wish to be and whether you see those traits. Self-love should be the result of being aware of your true self, being aware of *what you are not*.

I set out my journey here to create worlds far away from reality, and I am ending my journey here, with the intent to complete additional work that brings to light the nature of our reality. Work that shows us that art is not just an imitation of reality but can envelop the central idea of reality through a different lens. Reality is subjective. It is up to us to trim the fat and find sustenance and meaning in our lives and express those ideas through art. I'd like to thank everyone I've met over the past eight years, my colleagues, friends, and my mentors and advisors for helping me find that crucial balance of who I am as an artist, and more importantly, who I am not.

Final Thoughts

To reiterate, I started along this process intending to make a story that was as far from my personal life as possible. However, I'm not sure that's how life plays out when you're an artist. Art is subjective at best, and the reason behind that is the interpretation of it. Art is inherently personal; that's what makes it mean something. I started this journey wanting to make an audience feel something. In hindsight, I think what the most important factor was, was that I felt something. It's a motivation I didn't realize until the end of the road with this film.

Looking back on this film, intent, goals, and the overall process, every decision was made to put my personality into it as much as possible. It was a way to find self-acceptance and reassurance. This film doesn't show every latitude of who I am as an artist; It shows who I am as a person. The lessons I've learned through life, the different methods I've had to use to cope with stress, pain, and loss. At the end of the road, we, as a species, are all living the same life. We might have different backgrounds, stories, and experiences, but the result is still the same. We have emotions. This film culminated from what I think my life is, but in the end, the film is representative of all of us, with a singular demand. Accept yourself for who you are.

Sea of Smiles

(Working Title)

Paul Benns

3D Abstract Narrative

MFA Thesis Proposal

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, New York

March 2018

Approved for Submission by:

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Mark J. Reisch, Thesis Chair

Log Line

The primal instinct to survive and the slow ache of a bruise that never heals, is the emotional equivalent of watching paint dry.

Treatment

Sea of Smiles is a 3D abstract film that follows a miniature faceless character, BLUE, along his journey through the constant damaging effects of life. The film uses representational imagery and a series of vignettes to depict his inner emotional struggle created from outward forces and events.

A sphere rolls into frame and falls off a table. The Sphere shatters into hundreds of smaller spheres across the floor. They gather together and reform into a blue figure. Blue is a toddler and is playing with a ball. An obvious black stain is visible on his arm. Blue runs around the room kicking the ball. As Blue plays with the ball, he ages. Blue, now a teenager, kicks the ball and it hits a black figure made of cubes. The figure and Blue play with the ball and blue falls. The figure rushes to his aid, only to notice the stain on his arm. The black figure pushes blue away from him. Blue is shoved into the spine of a closed book. He tries to hide his stain under his hand when the black figure dissolves into smoke and passes through Blue. The smoke envelopes the scene to transition into a new environment.

Blue is shattered over a floor made of tile. He begins to regroup and is staring at the stain on his arm. Blue tries to remove the stained spheres, but trips. He stares at himself in the reflection of a razorblade. After some deliberation, he runs his body along the edge. A sphere opens and releases a black viscous fluid. Blue collapses onto the ground and leans against the razorblade, as smoke transitions the environment again.

Blue falls into the frame and curls up on a countertop with his head in the lap of another figure. The figure runs their hand along blues head, with maternal comfort. Blue drags himself to his feet and gives the other figure a hug. The other figure grabs Blue's arm and points out the drained sphere. They shove Blue over and over. They push Blue up against the base of a wooden

knife holder. Blue strikes the wood with his fist, creating a hole. As he glances between the hole and his stain, in remorse for what he had done, he staggers backwards and falls apart. The spheres roll off the edge of the countertop.

The spheres fall and gather on a park bench. Blue is sitting next to another figure. This figure, made of cubes, seems to make him happy. Their body language shows they have a strong connection. The figure has stains of their own. Blue excited to meet someone like him, points them out and reveals his own stains. The figure looks at Blue in horror, falling backwards and shattering. Smoke turns the scene into a void. Blue begins to run through the void, coming across multiple figures. Some hug him, some kiss him, and some just share a small gesture of friendship. Every figure disintegrates and falls apart as he touches them. Blue is alone.

The scene transitions to Blue standing over an unconscious body. He takes his own spheres and replaces damaged ones on the unconscious figure. A montage of this act of repairing others' damage and losing a part of himself continues over multiple occurrences.

Blue is in a room alone, he begins to try and damage the large objects around him. In his effort to tear the room apart, in his frustration, Blue hits the wall and then smashes his fists into the ground. The floor falls through and Blue follows. Landing next to a giant stethoscope. A giant pill bottle falls into the frame and Blue climbs inside. The stains fade a small amount. Blue is at peace for a brief moment. Suddenly, he grabs his head and lashes out. He runs out of the bottle and throws himself against it; Sending the bottle out of frame. Exhausted, he curls into a bed made from a cigarette to fall asleep. The stains return to their previous severity.

Blue is approached by a figure made of red spheres that is recognizable as someone he repaired earlier. She tries to drag Blue out of bed. He pulls back and she hugs him. Reluctantly, he starts to hug back, only to realize his enjoyment. Excitedly he jumps up. Red grabs his hand

and they begin jumping from surface to surface together. Each surface is that of a new environment. First a car dashboard, then a dinner table, and afterwards, a pillow. After passing each environment, Blue moves slower and slower to the point that red is practically dragging him. As they fall asleep, blue becomes restless and is trying to hide the growing stain. This time, it works, and the growth slows. Blue is excited, only to realize that this happened because Red had given him a part of her own spheres. Blue gives a part of himself in return. Smoke takes the scene away.

Blue is now almost all black. They scrub and scrub the stain, but nothing is working. Blue gets frustrated and pushes past Red as she tries to help. Red falls unconscious and a stain is visible at the impact point. Blue tries to help, and nothing works. Becoming helpless, Blue gives the last bit of himself to Red, trying to fix the damage he caused. The stain he created on Red fades. Returning to her previous self, Red wakes up and Blue runs away, slamming the door. Everything turns black.

Blue is sitting alone with his hands pressed to his temple. Distressed, he begins reaching into himself and pulling himself apart. He begins assembling something with the pieces. Blue takes a step back, he is breathing heavy and his hands are covered in a black liquid, but the rest of his body is blue again. He stares forward. Blue is face to face with the stained version of himself. They stare at one another for a prolonged period. His head falls forward and his body hunches, defeated. The figure across from him, lifts blues head, and embraces him.

Rationale

Depression can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It can be created through specific events or exist on its own without any outward triggers. It's something I've had to watch family members, friends,

and myself struggle with. Society tends to misunderstand this disease as periods of intense sadness, when in reality, it's something you struggle with your entire life. It can worsen through tougher periods of life, but still manifest itself throughout the happier times as well. I want to capture that this is not just a sad moment in someone's life, but rather it's a clinical disorder that persist throughout all life events in varying levels of severity.

In some cases, patients with a mental disorder will view themselves as having a defect, especially clinical variations that they are born with. The scenes of the film are meant to be a visualization of the various events that can influence or be created from this disease and the feeling of being damaged or defective. These feelings can escalate, either through the direct influence of negativity or someone's own internal struggle with feeling damaged.

I believe that the internal side needs to be shown more. I want to capture the essence that there is no current cure, but rather it is imperative to accept one's imperfections and grow from them. I want to tell this story, to help visualize for others, the struggle of living with something that starts as a small mark but can grow and envelope a personality to the point that an individual destroys themselves and loses sight of who they are.

I wish for the audience to experience the emotions presented in the film as a relationship to their own lives. Each scene is intended to invoke specific emotions and I hope to encourage empathy with the audience with a key theme of feeling comfortable in one's own skin.

Visuals

For this film I plan to use a mixture of software that includes Maya for animation, Houdini for particle generation and smoke transitions, and Nuke for compositing. The animation will be captured with motion capture to ensure the capture of subtle body language, with key moments being exaggerated in Maya.

Each scene is set in a large environment in which the characters are miniatures in. The scenes will be composed of specific objects that will represent and portray the location that the character is in. This will range from desk tops and large books representing an academic environment, to a car dashboard with a very large steering wheel that the characters will then interact with.

The characters will be composed of spherical and cubic geometry to portray differences between the negative and internal forces. A facial structure will be defined to differentiate the back and front of the body, however, there will be no defined facial animation. The story will be completely portrayed through body language.

The film will also contain a shallow depth of field with volumetric lighting to exaggerate each scene and give it an ethereal look.

The film will also be accompanied by rich sound design with a hint of audio abstractions to exaggerate specific emotions. The sound design will change dynamically to capture the range of emotions the character will feel. It is hopeful that music will accompany some scenes, however key moments of the film will be better fit by purely environmental audio.
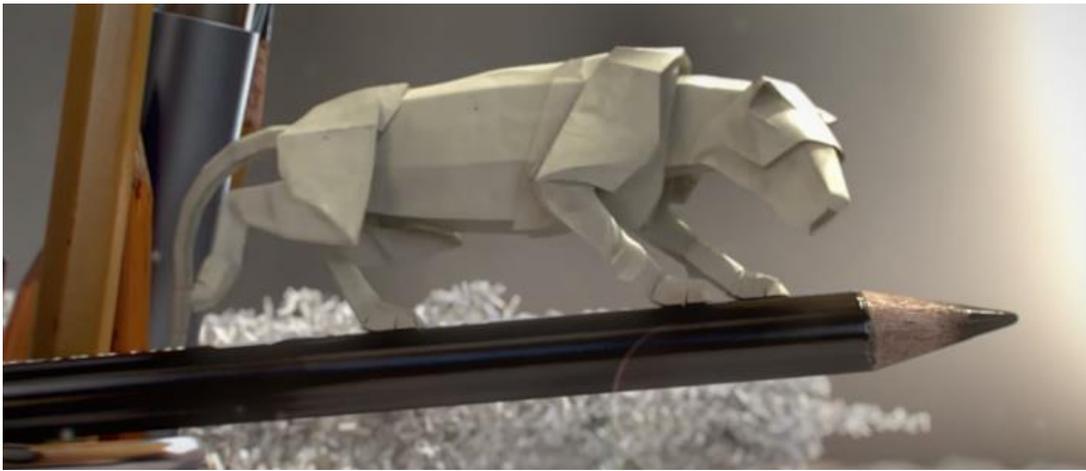
Budget

Sea of Smiles Budget					
Item	Quantity	Subtotal	In Kind	Total Cost	
Software					
Houdini	1	$1,995	$1,995	$0	
NukeX	1	$8,443	$8,443	$0	
Maya	2	$3,010	$1,505	$1,505	
Adobe Creative Suite(Yearly)	2	$1,199.76	$599.88	$599.88	
Protools	1	$999	$999	$0	
Hardware					
Workstation	1	$2,299	$0	$2,299	
Working Drives	2	$360	$0	$360	
Backup Drives	2	$320	$0	$320	
Google Drive	1	$120	$120	$0	
Talent					
Composer	1	$500	$0	$500	
Marketing/Release					
Promotional Items	-	$500	$0	$500	
Festival Fees	5	$250	$0	$500	
Contingency					
Contingency (20%)	1	$3,999.20	$0	$1,316.80	
Total					
		$23,995	$13,662	$7,901	Total
			$1,212	$701.19	Tax(8.875%)
				$9,814	Grand Total

Timeline

Task	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April
Pre-Production								
Script rough	██							
Script final	██							
Beatboard	██							
Storyboard	██							
Character design	██							
Scratch sound	██							
Animatic	██							
Timing	██							
Production								
Backgrounds			██	██				
Character model			██	██				
Character texture			██	██				
Character rigging			██	██				
Lighting			██	██	██			
Music			██	██	██			
Environment			██	██				
Blocking			██	██				
Splining					██			
Transitions					██			
Post-Production								
Rendering					██	██	██	
Compositing							██	██
Titles and credits								██
Final Sound mix					██	██	██	
Final output								██

Screenshots of *Dead on Arrival* (2019)

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